

## On Being a Linguist and Doing Linguistics: Negotiating Ideology through Performativity

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In this paper I explore and contrast the multiple positions available to me as a linguist, both within the academy and in the communities where I do fieldwork. These domains make quite different demands on me in my professional practice. In my experience, transitioning between these domains can be challenging, since the assumptions about my identity and role are divergent and often conflicting. I use the concept of performativity to identify the different positions I enact and which are attributed to me in each of these roles. I suggest that rather than seeing a binary division between academia and community, it may be useful to conceive of our work with communities as occurring in a third space that is shared by members of the relevant community, but which is distinct from the community *per se*. Such a distinction provides space for both linguists and communities to negotiate the extent to which ideas, methods, and ideologies from one field are expected to infiltrate another. The advantage of such a model is that it allows everyone involved to recognize and, where appropriate, engage with the frameworks of others. This facilitates a richer understanding of the forces at play in language development work and allows competing priorities a place in the process.

**1. INTRODUCTION.**<sup>1</sup> To work as a linguist in a community with an endangered language is to stand in a difficult place. This is because endangered languages are typically associated with relatively small communities whose cultures and ways of life have been placed under great pressure to conform to the larger and more powerful communities, cultures, and ways of life that surround them.<sup>2</sup> My impulse to stand with the community and support their

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to acknowledge the important contribution that Christina Eira has made to this paper through a long series of conversations about our roles as linguists and the ways we can make sense of the tensions we find around us, both in academia and in the communities where we work. Thanks also to Peter Austin, Catherine Easton, Mark Planigale, and Shannon Woodcock for encouragement and ideas, and to Anthony Jukes, Sarah Cutfield, Julia Sallabank, Ruth Singer, and Donna Starks for comments on an earlier draft of the paper. Our conversations suggest that there is much more about our work that could be explored along the lines of the discussion presented here. Thanks also to two anonymous reviewers for their very helpful feedback.

<sup>2</sup> For most of this paper I am using the term (the) community in a very generic sense, defined mainly in contrast with academia. In doing this, I do not intend to suggest that the speech communities concerned—including those where I have worked (as discussed below)—are to any significant extent “the same” or, indeed, internally homogeneous (see also Macri 2010 and Whaley 2011). This is simply a rhetorical device that allows me to focus on my experiences of being a linguist rather than on the particulars of work in any specific community. I explore some relevant specifics of communities in Section 6, in relation to ethical issues arising from the model of professional practice developed here.

efforts to respond to these pressures on their own terms is always in tension with my need to act out my role as an academic researcher.

In spite of the growing awareness of the importance, efficacy, and ethical necessity of empowering research (Cameron et al. 1992), and calls for a shift to this model among linguists (for example, Czaykowska-Higgins 2009, Rice 2009, Gerdts 2010), changes that would make this a workable reality for the majority of linguists—for example in employment criteria, promotions criteria, and publication opportunities (including recognition of “non-scholarly” and not-sufficiently-theoretical works, such as materials in archives and text collections for community use)—are slow (see also Gerdts 2010:191; Warner, Luna & Butler 2007; some positive progress in terms of research funding is reported in Rice 2010). This is in part because change within academia is driven by a range of institutional and economic pressures at all levels. It also results from the ambiguities of our position. The often-absent voices of speakers and other community members who could legitimize our case and whose interests we are seeking to represent are not always readily heard and, in any case, may in fact be ambivalent about our work.

Evidence for the complexity of these relationships and the difficulties involved in negotiating these roles is apparent in a recent spate of papers that discuss models for, and personal histories of, working effectively with communities (Dobrin 2008, Rice 2009, Speas 2009, Dwyer 2010, Francetto 2010, Guérin & Lacrampe 2010, Hinton 2010, Rice 2010, Whaley 2011). In this paper, I take a step back from the practicalities of managing these relationships to consider the ways in which background ideologies and the identities they construct constrain not only actions available in different contexts, but also the expectations we—both linguists and community members—have of each other within them. After some experimenting, I have settled on an explicitly personal tone in this piece. It is self-referential as a means of speaking from my own ground without imposing what I think on the reader. But this voice is also intended as an invitation to the reader to explore the ideas and experiences raised here for themselves with reference to their own experiences, and to emphasize the connection between the ideological frames we all work within and the personal relationships in which these ideologies are played out.

The comments I am making here are based on my experience working in a geographically and politically diverse range of communities. Each of these communities has a reputation for being a “difficult” one in which to work, mainly due to the persistent assertions these communities make in regards to maintaining authority over their languages and cultures. Table 1 summarizes these communities and the nature of my relationships with each of them. Note that my work with the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages (VACL) is a recent development, and is not the main focus of my comments here. This recent relationship has, however, been a very significant source of inspiration for me in my recent thinking about how to make sense of my role as a linguist, and it will be mentioned again below in Section 5.

Language group	Main period of engagement	Main research products	Nature of relationship	Relevant references	Nature of living/working arrangements	Motives for work
Sm'algyax (Tsimshian Nation, BC, Canada)	1996–2000 (visits to community: 1996, 1997–98, 1999; total: 18 months)	Sm'algyax Learner's dictionary, PhD thesis; revised version published 2003	1996: interested outsider; 1997–99: contracted technical advisor	Stebbins 2003	Rented room in Prince Rupert (current pop. 15,000) with occasional trips to remote villages on reserves along coast; regular committee work.	Work associated with PhD thesis
Mali Baining community (East New Britain Province, Papua New Guinea)	2001–2010 (fieldwork: 2001, 2002, 2005; total: 15 months)	Grammar, dictionary, text collection (published by Pacific Linguistics), plus other papers	Self-funded visitor to community working on goals agreed upon with community leaders	Stebbins 2004, Stebbins & Planigale 2009	Extended periods staying in remote village without infrastructure of any kind. Six-hour dinghy ride to nearest town (Kokopo). Daily meetings with main consultant, sporadic recording sessions, additional data collection with many others.	Work initiated during post-doc at Research Centre for Linguistic Typology, La Trobe University
Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages (Melbourne, Australia)	2010–2014	Developing a typology of language revival, incorporating linguistic and Indigenous perspectives	Project partner beginning in second phase of project, which was initiated by Eira & Couzens	See <a href="http://www.vaclang.org.au/project-detail.aspx?ID=28">www.vaclang.org.au/project-detail.aspx?ID=28</a> for further information	Living in my own home—no special arrangements or extended travel required for meetings. Mostly working from materials compiled as part of the project with occasional follow-up with contributors.	Work done in conjunction with other duties at La Trobe University, where I am an Associate Professor

TABLE 1. Summary of the author's fieldwork experience

It is clear from Table 1 that my experiences are not representative of all the settings or types of work that linguists do in communities. Nevertheless, in various ways and at different points, my field experiences represent the extremes in terms of race relations, differences in wealth, work in difficult physical conditions, levels of engagement with the communities under study, and so forth. I write this account not because I expect that it will resonate directly with every reader, but because the model I develop herein provides insights that may be useful right across the spectrum of work that we do with speakers, especially in cases where relationships are potentially difficult. Colleagues have sometimes suggested that I can at times be excessively sensitive to issues which do not appear particularly problematic to others. As a potential outlier in both respects, what I frame here is a conceptual space that can be used to accommodate many other types of less-extreme situations and experiences. The practical value of this space is that it can be used in negotiating any kind of fieldwork arrangement, including those that we would not normally characterize as “fieldwork,” since they may not involve travel out of our normal geographical zones to study groups to which we clearly do not belong. It is a conceptual tool that can be used in making explicit, talking about, and negotiating a range of expectations and pressures involved in linguists’ relationships with professional bodies, as well as with community representatives.

When I have approached the communities where I have worked in my role as a linguist, I have brought my good intentions, my disciplinary knowledge, and my identity as a highly educated professional from a powerful outsider group. These things are manifestations of the power available to me to act in relation to the community, since the resources available to me in economic terms (allowing me to travel and conduct research on someone else’s language) and in terms of my ability to influence academic discourses about the languages, and hence the communities where I work, are not equally available to them. This is true in spite of the fact that, on a day to day level, I may frequently experience myself as relatively powerless in these encounters, because I cannot meet my own basic needs (especially in Papua New Guinea) or am located socially on the margins because of my status as an outsider, and because—as I have quickly become aware—people within the community have their own priorities and agendas. There are two areas of this puzzle that I want to explore in this paper: one is the performative nature of the linguist’s professional identity, and the other is the contingent nature of the fields of knowledge in which we work.

In this paper I make use of Judith Butler’s concept of performativity, which argues that we continuously enact our identities, and that this is a negotiated process since others are always attributing identities to us. As Section 2 will show, I consider the implications of the concept that I enact and am attributed with multiple identities. The different contexts of community and academia produce different identities for me whether I want them or not, since these contexts are populated by different groups who bring different discourses, experiences, and expectations to their interactions with me. In other words, my identity in each field is co-constructed. As Butler explains, the performative construction of the subject is “not merely an act used by a pre-given subject, but is one of the powerful and insidious ways in which subjects are called into social being, inaugurated into sociality by a variety of diffuse and powerful interpellations” (1999:125).

Although Butler notes constraints on the subject seeking to enact identity, the concept of performativity provides new possibilities, insofar as I am able to think

consciously about how identity could be negotiated and how I can make the best ethical use of this potential freedom. Kirby (2006:20) summarizes this phase of Butler's work by saying that she "explores the tactical juggle that comes with admitting the provisional nature of identity, while at the same time acknowledging that identity is a political necessity with an experiential reality." This highlights a number of aspects of performativity that could be applied to the practice of linguistics.

First, identity is provisional, as I certainly experience for myself in transitioning between community and academia. In making these transitions, I find myself juggling, often inelegantly, different aspects of my identity as a linguist. The way I "do" linguistics is radically different in each setting, and it can take some time to settle into the "other" role. For example, I consciously practice not using technical vocabulary unless it is absolutely unavoidable while in the field, whereas in academia, the manipulation of rather esoteric categories and concepts is expected and serves as a marker of group belonging, as well as being technically useful. After a period of fieldwork, it can take me some time to relocate my technical vocabulary and begin to actively deploy it in academic settings. It feels as if I have put this knowledge away from myself as a corollary to functioning effectively in the field.

Secondly, this approach allows room for the politics of identity and the experiential consequences associated with any particular identity. For me, part of the attraction of Butler's work is the empowering idea that it could be possible to be tactical in juggling aspects of identity, even to a limited extent, in specific contexts—that I could make more purposeful choices in this field even if I cannot always control their effects. I mentioned the use of jargon above, but these choices could extend to much more fundamental ideologically mediated issues, such as the ways in which authority is deployed in developing orthography (Easton 2007) or the criteria for speakerhood in a given community (Evans 2001; Warner, Luna & Butler 2007).

Third, and finally, the other idea I will employ later in this paper is Foucault's concept of "fields of knowledge" and, in particular, his model of the relationship between knowledge and power. The basic association between knowledge and power provides a foundation for new ideas about how one can behave in regard to the fields of knowledge in which one operates. Foucault has argued that the establishment of a domain of knowledge changes the political practices and ethical attitudes that concern it. "There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations" (Foucault 1977:27).

Within Foucault's work, McNay (1999:177) notes a tension between the power that disciplines hold over the individuals working within them to direct their work and its meanings, and the opposing forces individuals experience in seeking to make unique and specific sense of themselves and their behavior in particular contexts. In the remainder of this paper, I explore these ideas as potential means toward a more flexible self-concept and a more responsive set of approaches to contributing disciplinary knowledge to the communities in which I work. I think that both these changes are necessary, in order to really stand with the community as they search for their own responses to the pressures associated with language endangerment.

**2. PROFESSIONAL ROLES ACROSS DIFFERENT SETTINGS.** Being a linguist is not a clearly defined professional role. Although we have professional associations, with the exception of statements concerning ethics, there are no basic standards of professional practice for us to follow. This partly reflects the fact that we work across a large set of subdisciplines and sometimes in very divergent roles depending on whether, at any given time, we occupy spaces within academia or in the community. Dent & Whitehead (2002) note that there is more at stake in these transitions than we might at first think:

Being a professional suggests an ontological location... to be denied professional identification is to be denied access to the narratives that reify it (Ricoeur 1991). The 'I' cannot talk with the authority of a professional, cannot give an account of itself as a professional, unless the discursive association is prior held and legitimized in the eyes of others (Dent & Whitehead 2002:5).

Many of us, particularly those of us in the subdisciplines of language documentation and language description, switch from academic to community domains on a regular basis, and in these transitions our professional identity is repeatedly renegotiated. For a long time, I have attempted to make sense of myself as a linguist by seeking to reconcile my roles in these distinctive domains into a single role. It seemed as though life would make more sense if I could reconcile these essentially competing demands. I have always known that there are others who also struggle with aspects of this dichotomy. Privately and in strict confidence, we linguists complain to each other about being ridiculed by members of the community and having to listen while linguists as a general category are denounced, with ourselves personally (perhaps) as exceptions. On a relatively light-hearted note, for example, we can read of Senft's nicknames among the Kilivila, which for some years were based on words that he was using incorrectly (1995:214). To some extent, this is a disciplinary problem, since complaints perhaps increasingly relate to expectations that we are not able to meet. For example, among those of us who work with endangered languages, there are relatively few who are trained to do many of the things that would benefit language revival most directly (for example, in relation to literacy development). Gerds (2010:181), in a frank discussion of these issues, points out that documentary/descriptive linguists would be better prepared for making real contributions to communities if they had training in language teaching and second language acquisition research (see also Hinton 2011). Given the recent focus on documentary work with speakers of endangered languages, our collective lack of expertise in these areas is noteworthy. It appears to be indicative of a gap between academically- and community-driven priorities.

Somewhat less privately, we trouble over how to reconcile the demands of academic careers that can work against any good we may be able to do in the community. These latter issues have had more public discussion. For example, Pensalfini (2004:153–4) points out that the actions that make us “good” linguists as we work in the community do not make us more employable in academia (his specific example was developing a handbook for explaining differences between Standard Australian English and Kriols and Aboriginal English to the Queensland judiciary). He also expresses his frustration and disappointment that the language salvage work he has done on Ngarnka does not benefit the community more directly. Also in Australia, Eira (2007) describes the difficulties she experiences in trying to reconcile her understanding of the causes of language endangerment (through



processes of colonization) with the power differentials that the academic role of linguist holds firmly in place. Eira & Stebbins (2008) explore the ways in which these power differentials impose disciplinary ideologies on communities, and in the process, create trouble for everyone involved.

Particularly for those of us involved with fieldwork, whether as academics doing occasional fieldwork or as community linguists or language activists whose contact with academia may be more limited, the disjunctions between disciplinary expectations and ideologies and the realities of working in a community can become a sore point. In this paper I am looking for a model that would allow me to ethically and sincerely engage with the views of the community as I work with them on language issues at the same time as I manage the disciplinary expectations I face within academia. In both cases, I need to be able to apply my disciplinary skills and knowledge to analytical problems I encounter, but the means and the ends in each case can vary considerably. The puzzle is in how these differing, even competing, means and ends are to be situated in relation to the story of myself.

I do not expect to arrive at a place in which all the potential conflicts associated with these two fields are resolved, but I hope that by drawing apart the two fields and their associated roles and expectations, I am better able to see where and why points of tension develop. I wonder whether it may be possible to set some of this tension aside by allowing community and disciplinary concerns each to have their own distinctive space and letting go of the idea that these need to be fully reconciled in the ways I have sought in the past. I begin by setting out the roles and identities available to me in academic and community settings (Sections 2.1–2), and then consider the roles available to community representatives across these domains (Sections 2.3–4). In both cases, I comment specifically on the following parameters: (a) insider/outsider status, (b) appropriate display of knowledge, and (c) competency in daily tasks.

**2.1. LINGUISTS' ROLES AND IDENTITIES IN THE ACADEMIC SETTING.** I am now an insider in the community of academic linguists in Australia. I have achieved this status by virtue of my professional relationships, publications record, and other parameters of my professional history. This status is also based on my position in a Linguistics program at an Australian university. As an insider, I have rights and obligations that I am expected to meet. As my career progresses, I have increasing scope to influence the progress of the discipline (through my role as a supervisor and examiner, and as evidenced, for example, by the publication of this paper). As an insider, I worry about professional relationships and keep a weather eye on university and national politics and the like, but I feel entitled to my own views and decisions in a way that is not possible in my role as an outsider in any of the communities where I have worked.

Compared to any other setting in which I operate, academia is unusual in its demand for the display of knowledge. In academia we expect and value the ability to display knowledge and to make connections between ideas explicit, and we actively seek the feedback and correction of others through processes such as peer review and in venues such as the discussion time in seminars. In academia, sometimes to our great discomfort, we always stand to be corrected. As such, if we do not use a correct term, the implication is available to others that we do not know it. Similarly, we spend all day being “linguicentric,” preoccupied by and focused on language—an indulgence unwelcome in other settings.

When I am working as an academic at the university where I am employed, the logistics of my daily life run in sustainable, mostly predictable ways that I have set up for myself. At home I own a car. Among other things, this means that grocery shopping is no big deal and that I have relative freedom to move around at night. Commensurate with my current academic status, I now have a reasonably stable set of living arrangements. I have managed to stay in the city where I was raised, so I have a network of long-standing friends and acquaintances.

Even in the daily rounds of my at-home life, I encounter strange constructions of my professional self. Anyone who works as a linguist has to develop strategies for explaining what they do for the lay public. Often this involves an answer to the question, “So, how many languages do you know?,” or a reassuring response to the comment, “Well, I’d better watch what I say!”

**2.2. LINGUISTS’ ROLES AND IDENTITIES IN COMMUNITY SETTINGS.** One of the best rewards for me in doing fieldwork is the feeling that I am recognized as a person (the person, Tonya, not the linguist *per se*) and that I am accepted for who I am—insofar as I am able to communicate this to others. Returning to these people and places is a kind of homecoming. In Papua New Guinea (PNG), I am often called Antonia, and to me this name speaks of the place I have earned in the community there. Nevertheless, I cannot achieve insider status in the communities where I work. I am disbarred from insider status by reasons of race, profession, and location of permanent residence, along with many other, less tangible things. As an outsider, accommodations are made for my behavior that would not be made for an insider’s. These accommodations are necessary to the working relationships within which I operate. And knowing all this, I still feel deeply connected to the places where and people with whom I have worked<sup>3</sup>.

As I noted in Section 1, I am aware that I have different practices around the use of technical jargon when I am in academia as opposed to being in the field. Although to some extent this represents a practical choice such that I avoid using jargon that community members will not understand, I think that this choice “stands for” a more extensive set of values around particular types of behavior. Economies of knowledge outside of academia do not demand such overt display and are managed in other ways. Norms of politeness tend to mean that incorrect statements are let go unless there is an immediate risk of trouble or danger. These same norms tend to mean that it is not polite to give the listener any more information than is necessary to communicate my message effectively. As a result, telling what I think I know may not be a particularly good strategy for gathering new information in the community. Incorrect statements are likely to be ignored rather than corrected, and I run the risk of appearing to be an ignorant, pompous bore.

Wherever I am working at a given moment, I enact and am attributed with characteristics of myself as a linguist, a fieldworker, a white woman, an academic, a mother, a wearer

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<sup>3</sup> I have published elsewhere on my experiences as a fieldworker—see Stebbins 2003:272–274 and Stebbins 2004, as well as Stebbins & Planigale 2009, for additional material. Along with other members of the Research Centre for Linguistic Typology at La Trobe University, I have also contributed personal experiences to a fieldwork manual now hosted by the Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity. (<http://www.rnld.org/node/220>). In this paper I have restricted myself to comments that relate to my experiences of my role as a site of tension and negotiation.



of glasses, and so on. Sometimes the meanings attributed to these roles vary considerably, depending on who is doing the attribution. For example, doing fieldwork in Papua New Guinea opens the possibility of me (quite erroneously) being attributed with Indiana Jones-like traits by students, family, friends, and non-fieldworker colleagues.

From the community perspective, there is no hint of Indiana Jones. In the field, my ability to fend for myself is radically different than when I am at home. I stayed in an area of Papua New Guinea where the lingua franca is Tok Pisin rather than English, so I initially lacked even a common language with the rest of the community. I was struck by the fact that the cultural differences in the village were so great, and my disorientation to being there was so extreme that on my second trip I could not even recognize that I had come to the same place; I had to relearn the faces of all the friends I had met on the first trip. Just being in the village was an overwhelming experience, and my memories of the first trip were quite divergent from what I encountered when I returned for the second. In having to relearn even the basics of self-care, I felt I was rendered infantile. I rated my capacities for many daily tasks as on par with a local three-year-old. Thus, there is a more grounded (accurate) view in which I am a rather helpless person in some respects, lacking in the skills necessary to support myself in the place I am (was) living, and at the same time having a remarkable facility with language and associated academic activities.

Tensions associated with my role also arise in negotiating how I relate to speakers during language work. For example, in my work with the Tsimshian Nation, I have observed that very often in language work,

The culturally appropriate role of the more fluent speakers, as elders, is to oversee the work of writing and to ensure that the results are good. This tends to mean that younger, less fluent speakers are also the ones who initially record words when people work as a group. This is a practice that reflects Tsimshian understandings about knowledge and learning, and less skilled speakers are given this role as a means of training. When the group works with outsiders, such as a curriculum developer or linguist, the work of recording words or sentences tends to fall to the outsiders ...

Again, these people have tended to be the ones holding the chalk. The main barrier to satisfactory use of the orthography tends to be the number of errors produced by non-speakers and semi-speakers who are not fully acquainted with the writing system. There are cultural limits on the number of times that fluent speakers can interrupt, in order to correct what has been written down—particularly if their comments are not sought. Furthermore, when the focus of the group is on some other aspect of the language, the expert tends to become frustrated by persistent comments which take the focus of the group away from the issues at hand (Stebbins 2002:175–6)<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup>This paper touches on orthography development by way of illustration in several places. To clarify my own position (as one reviewer requested), it is clear to me that community authorization is necessary for an effective orthography and that orthographies designed within the community are ideal. Just how authorization is established in practice will depend a great deal on local factors. Easton 2007 provides a thoughtful and comprehensive discussion of some relevant methods and issues.

All of these roles and their associated tensions are available over time, depending on the context, and I shuffle through them—or am shuffled through them by others—as circumstances require or permit. These facts restrict my ability to take charge of my identity and enact it in ways that would suit me. None of these things were the result of attributions by the community, though no doubt they had corollaries there; it was me who was experiencing the competency of a three-year-old and acting in response, me fed up with finessing the spelling—quite aside from what the community may have wanted or perceived.

**2.3. COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES' ROLES AND IDENTITIES IN THE ACADEMIC SETTING.** In my working life, there has been little opportunity for me to invite representatives from the communities in which I do fieldwork into an academic setting similar to the one I work in while at the university. In fact, most of the time community representatives and linguists seem to encounter each other within an academic space that is set up temporarily in the larger environment of the community. Thus, during my research with the Mali community, the veranda of my small wooden house was the principle site of research activities (apart from participant observation), and it was clear from the way people dressed (fancier than normal), spoke (using much more Tok Pisin—the lingua franca—than normal), and behaved (much more formally than normal) that in climbing the stairs to the veranda, they were crossing into a different space.

An early turning point in my working relationship in the Mali community occurred when Julius Tayul, who became the main consultant and a dear friend, took the pencil from my hand as I struggled to render the new and strange-sounding Mali text I was attempting to transcribe in IPA and did it himself orthographically in a fraction of the time. This low-key assertion of authority, expression of mild impatience, and demonstration of generous goodwill laid the foundations for a long and happy partnership and is a treasured memory <sup>5</sup>.

There is very little work that I am aware of that discusses how speakers who have taken these roles feel in this space. Based on my observations of people I have worked with in this setting in PNG, I would say that within the context of the research the consultant is an outsider, since they are generally guessing at what I will find relevant or helpful in my work, and because the social norms that I operated within as their host in my space were not the ones they were used to. Although I am committed to developing a community-driven model of research and sought to do so in the context of my research on Mali (Stebbins 2004), the day-to-day mechanics of collecting data for a grammar and dictionary were managed only by me. I imagine this must also have had an impact on consultants' feelings of competence in relation to the work. I worked with reference to a model of language description and documentation to which the community had no direct access. This must also have had an impact on the types of information people chose to reveal to me (Stebbins & Planigale 2009).

One notable exception to this general silence about the experience of crossing into aca-

<sup>5</sup> At the same time, it also left me with some concerns about how I would represent my research to others, since in some circles, transcriptions by speakers (and those using their orthographies) are considered to be a lazy and inaccurate means to a “higher” end. I began passing my field notes around and openly acknowledging the extent to which I relied on Julius's transcription skills only after some careful thought.

demia is McLaughlin & Sall 2001. In this paper, the authors report their individual experiences of working together in the roles of linguist and informant, respectively. Interestingly, they begin by noting that the exercise of writing their paper highlighted the difficulty for Sall in asserting the stance of the subject. This is presented to the reader through the following excerpt from a conversation about the preparation of the paper:

SALL: Somehow one has the impression that we are always the object and never the subject. We are the “material” that toubabs [whites] come to study.

MCLAUGHLIN: But this time, by presenting your own narrative, don’t you think that you have an opportunity to be the subject rather than the object?

SALL: (Laughter) I’ll talk about myself, but only at your initiative. So where does that put us?

(McLaughlin & Sall 2001:189; bracketed text mine)

**2.4. COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES’ ROLES AND IDENTITIES IN COMMUNITY SETTINGS.** In McLaughlin & Sall 2001, Sall’s description of his experiences in working with McLaughlin is couched very much in terms of his personal history and his identity in his community. As he describes the history of his work with McLaughlin, he refers to his aspirations for the future, his living conditions, and his role in his family. Although linguicentrism may be a feature of work with a linguist, and the best consultants typically have an interest in language, they also have lives outside of the work that make significant demands on their time and attention.

In Sall’s account of his role as a language informant, he indicates that he was chosen for the work on the basis of the languages he was able to speak, and that this arrangement was essentially a private commercial relationship between him and McLaughlin. This stands in contrast to the situation in many small Indigenous communities, where the identity of the people involved in such research is the subject of negotiation within the community as well as between the community and the researcher. In such a setting, the identity of the community representative is likely to include an understanding that the person concerned somehow holds authority in relation to the language, for example, by virtue of being a respected Elder or because of a particular role the person holds (for example, being a schoolteacher).

In either case, there may be expectations from the community about how community representatives conduct themselves in their work with academics. As discussed in Stebbins & Planigale 2009, there can be profoundly contrasting expectations around how knowledge is shared in this setting, and community representatives must find a way to negotiate these conflicting demands. The community also develops its own understandings of what the representative is supposed to be doing. For example, Sall reports that he was worried his uncle had concluded that Sall’s teaching must be poor since McLaughlin’s performance in the language was not up to his uncle’s expectations (McLaughlin & Sall 2001:206).

In their roles as community representatives within the community setting, the language consultants simultaneously have to deal with the expectations of the community and of academia. They are insiders and even leaders of the community at the same time as they are members of a socially subordinate group in a relationship characterized by power differentials (for example, as employees of the linguist concerned).

**2.5. SUMMARY.** My identity as a linguist is enacted differently in different settings. Furthermore, many identities are simultaneously available to me, although they are not equally salient, and some are more readily available to be discussed and negotiated than others. The status and identity of the community representatives with whom I work also differ according to the setting. The different settings of academia and community provide me with a set of contrasts that I can use to become more conscious of certain aspects of the range of identities available to me. Although, as Butler argues, identity is not only something we enact, it is also something that is attributed to us and is hence not something we can fully control, with knowledge about what identities are available to me, I can use them as resources on which to draw for instrumental purposes. For example, one of my favorite activities while doing fieldwork in Papua New Guinea was the afternoon trip to the river to bathe, wash the dishes, and do some laundry. This was the only regular set of activities that I had in common with the other women of the village where I worked, and it proved to be a significant opportunity for me to create space for myself as an individual rather than a white woman (who, it was suggested to me, would not choose to do the laundry or the dishes themselves).

There is much discussion about the extent to which we are constrained in our ability to contest the identities ascribed to us (see, for example, McNay 1999). Clearly, insofar as we cannot consciously control our behavior, and insofar as others ascribe identities to us, identities also function as constraints which in this context may hinder our work, social lives, and connection to others. In the Mali community, I was always and already a *misis* (Tok Pisin for ‘white woman’, with all the colonialist implications the corresponding term *masta* ‘white man’ more obviously denotes). I refused chairs when everyone else sat on the ground; I washed myself, my clothes, and my dishes in the river; I killed and cleaned fish, and so on—but although the community noticed and valued these things, it also noticed and made attributions based on the many things I could not or would not do (also cf. Senft 1995:220–221). For example, as much as people were open and friendly and interested in meeting me, I simply could not bear to be the center of communal attention and hid away on PNG Independence Day, when the village was full of curious visitors from other places, and I always sat at the back of the church since the place I was offered towards the front in a dense huddle of the younger women made me feel unbearably self-conscious. The noticing itself is a result of my identity as a *misis*. Within the community, none of these daily activities would normally attract this kind of attention.

**3. BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CURRENT MODEL.** Given the kinds of identities attributed to me and that I experience or aspire to hold, the roles I am able to enact as I work as a linguist in a community can only be within my control to a limited extent. Community-controlled or collaborative projects pose highly visible issues around how roles are negotiated, assigned, and sometimes shared. Working effectively in such a setting places additional demands on everyone concerned, insofar as normative roles such as expert-as-savior and docile recipient—so familiar to us from domains as diverse as the medical model or the teacher-student dyad—are contested and renegotiated. Eira (2007) points to a conundrum in our work as experts contributing to the community through the power that accrues to our roles (see also Hinton 2010). When we are able to take on responsibility for creating space for language activities or devolving decision-making, yet at the same time we want to step back and allow the community to

provide leadership, we experience the conundrum also identified by Sall & McLaughlin: how can an invited subject be a true subject?

I view all the work I have done in communities as being informed by a community-driven agenda. As Table 1 indicates, in some cases this has involved specific types of roles, agreements, or goals in the communities where I have worked. For me, part of the challenge in negotiating these relationships (Stebbins 2002, 2003, 2004, Stebbins & Planigale 2009) has been around the following:

- my own understanding of who I am,
- what worthwhile things I have to offer, and
- how I can reasonably deliver these things.

It makes sense that my role is overtly contested since it is the role around which power has accrued. Communities generally have (individually) quite divergent understandings of each of these three aspects of me-as-linguist. They are informed by a whole range of contextual factors that I extrapolate must include these:

- their observations of people in apparently analogous roles,
- their ideas about how power should (not) be attributed/shared, and
- their confidence in my ability to behave well (possibly informed by their experiences of both me and others in the [remote] past).

When I work in a community, a great deal of how I do linguistics is negotiable. This includes concerns such as these:

- my methods of gathering information,
- the specific topics I focus on,
- the extent to which I learn the language, and
- the ways in which partnerships with community members develop.

These negotiations are not always explicit, they are never one-sided, never finished, and I strongly suspect that no one is ever fully satisfied with the results. Nevertheless, it is possible to establish a happy balance for a period in relation to a particular issue. In these spaces good things can be accomplished. In my experience, this tends to happen where it has been possible for each side to be clear with themselves and others about needs and expectations relating to key parameters on the above lists. Clearly it is worth investing effort and thought to develop effective social skills so that these relationships can weather the ups and downs of the process. I have generally tried to be quite explicit about what my issues and perspectives have been. In some cases this directness has been appreciated, but in others it has been less successful. Roles are constantly being renegotiated at the same time as the “content work” goes ahead. Given the complexity of the historical contexts in which I have worked, I am surprised that things have gone as well as they have.

**4. POWER AND KNOWLEDGE AS NEGOTIATED OUTCOMES.** In addition to negotiating about roles, it has become increasingly clear to me that it is also necessary to negotiate the boundaries of relevant fields of knowledge relating to language. It is necessary to explicitly question and negotiate what is to be involved in working with language, what counts as being within the domain of language. As Eira & Stebbins (2008) show, both linguists and communities have ideologies around what language should be like and how language work should proceed. These result in different sets of desires, goals, and capacities, as discussed by Rice (2009:38), who characterizes the alienation resulting from these differences as “two solitudes” that can perhaps be bridged.

Bridging these solitudes is the most challenging issue for me in working with a community. This is because the ideologies that inform decision-making from each perspective are naturalized, and as such they seem unamenable to explicit discussion and adaptation. In seeking to manage competing aims, I have sometimes found myself walking a singular path of solitude—alienated from both the community and the imagined shelter of my discipline. It can be difficult to satisfy the demands of both sides at once, as illustrated by my worries about what my peers would say if I were to record in my grammar that the community and I agreed that a phonemic orthography would not be ideal (see also Whaley 2010:364–367 on the seductiveness of a retreat to disciplinary certainties). As this particular worry indicates, there is clear interaction between negotiating political power and language ideology. The issue often boils down to the question of who determines what is right, what is to be done, and how it should be carried out.

It seems to me that I have operated up until now with an idealized model of community/linguistic interaction in which there was a juncture between linguistics and the community that was non-controversial and contained expectations, ideologies, and decisions that made sense from both sides. This model is represented as a pair of overlapping shapes in Diagram 1. The overlapping area represents the expectation on each side that, insofar as communities and linguists work together, the “other” side will accommodate to the views of one’s own side. In practice, this translates into a position in which the community expects me to be able to see things from its perspective and endorse the approaches they “know” are correct, and similarly, I expect the community to accept any aspects of linguistics I deem to be relevant as both useful and correct.

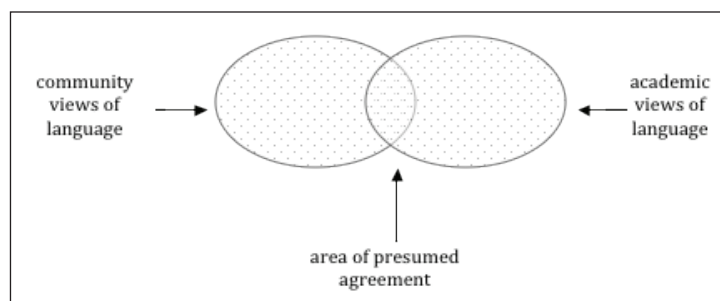


DIAGRAM 1. An idealization of the relation between academic and community fields of knowledge



In reality, however, my experiences in communities tell me that there are significant ideological and practical differences between the community and the discipline. This sometimes includes a range of widely varying answers to the questions, what is important? what must we do first? how do we proceed? There are also ideological differences within particular communities, and within and between subdisciplines of linguistics, that are not represented in the diagram. These differences result in a field of professional activity that I have experienced as riven with competing choices and demands. It is a field where the stakes can seem very high, both in terms of my ability to maintain decent relationships in the community and my ability to get and keep an academic job. It is a field in which I only have access to “right” and “wrong” decisions, and where a right decision from the perspective of the community is (and sometimes feels almost guaranteed to be) wrong in terms of the discipline. These views are indicated in Diagrams 2 and 3, in which the perspective of one group is imposed onto the space of the other group. In this mode of thinking, I cannot afford to self-identify with my discipline, as this alienates me from the community—but the reverse is also true. Foucault’s observation that knowledge presupposes and constitutes power is clearly apparent in these diagrams.

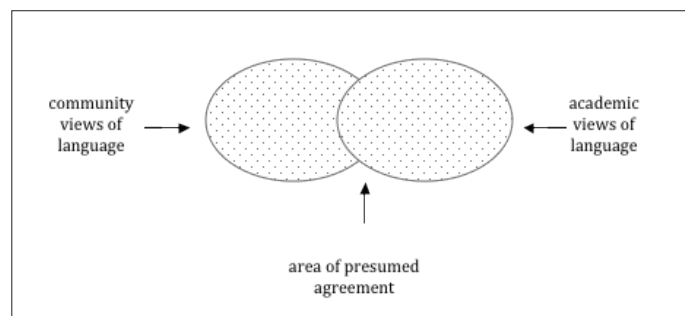


DIAGRAM 2. Linguistics as a field of knowledge dominates in relations with community

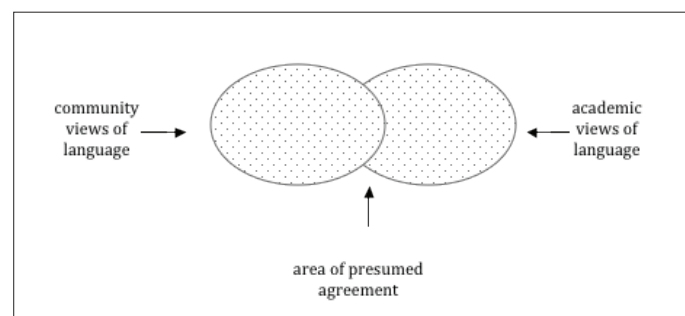


DIAGRAM 3. The community field of knowledge dominates in relations with the linguist

The difficulty for me has been that I asked myself—and felt that the community was in effect asking me—to personally reconcile or hold the responsibility for any conflict

between these ideologies. I have felt that the community was entitled to ask this of me, especially since I have generally viewed myself as working for them in one way or another. Other linguists have also spoken of feeling as though they carry a certain amount of baggage for the community. Although we say we do this willingly, it seems to me that it is not a viable strategy in the long term. I have been frustrated that linguistics as a discipline has been slow to respond to these conflicts and resolve them for me (or at least to shield me from them). Now I am beginning to think that the idealized model in Diagram 1 is a fundamental part of the problem.

Linguists often participate in meetings relating to particular language families. Often there is no one from their respective communities present—especially if those communities are distant or restricted from travel by economics and logistics. We comment to each other about these absences and worry a bout how to get more community members trained and participating in the discipline. I think this is generally understood to be a means of empowering communities in relation to their languages. The last time this happened, the issue was raised hard on the heels of papers relating to historical linguistics in a research paradigm that is not interested in accounting for present-day community perspectives or language practices. It put me in mind of Kristeva's (1984:13) assertion that linguistics has an unhealthy preoccupation with the dead. I wondered why any community representative would be motivated to take the long road to becoming a trained linguist specifically in order to listen to or engage in work by linguists about how things used to be in the period pre-colonization or about the latest in formalist abstractions when there is so much to heal, to learn, and to engage with in the languages as they live now. I suspected that the community language workers were off having a more interesting time somewhere else. I also wondered whether indoctrination into the discipline might in fact sometimes be a disempowering process for a community representative, given the fact that community and disciplinary fields of knowledge are so often experienced as being at odds with each other.<sup>6</sup> In one group with which I am loosely linked, two e-mail lists are maintained, and people can choose which they use: one specifically for linguists, or another for a wider audience that includes both linguists and others working with community languages in various capacities. This arrangement acknowledges that there are overlapping concerns between the two groups, and that while academics have the resources to support this type of interaction, there is a fair body of activity that one group is involved in that is not of direct interest to the other.

This separation of the domains of community and academia, which I have argued above is a fact of identity, is not only useful in setting up e-mail lists: it also provides the basis for new ways of understanding how these two fields of knowledge could relate to each other, and indeed, there is no reason to stop at two spaces. In the model I am proposing here, there is a third space. In addition to a space for the disciplinary ideologies, concerns, preoccupations, and practices of linguistics, and one for the community in which linguistics does not of its own volition intrude, I imagine a new shared space that allows linguists and community representatives to interact as equals. In this new space, everyone with an interest in language is an insider. This model is set out in Diagram 4. As the diagram shows,

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<sup>6</sup>Linguistic training can, of course, be highly empowering to speakers of endangered languages, as will be discussed in Section 5.

there is interaction among the three fields. The purpose of the middle field is to accommodate and mediate interaction between community and linguistics. The bidirectional arrows show that influence runs to and from this middle circle and the other circles. The shading across the middle circle is intended to suggest that there is scope for new things to happen within this space, since perspectives of each field can influence the others in transformative ways.

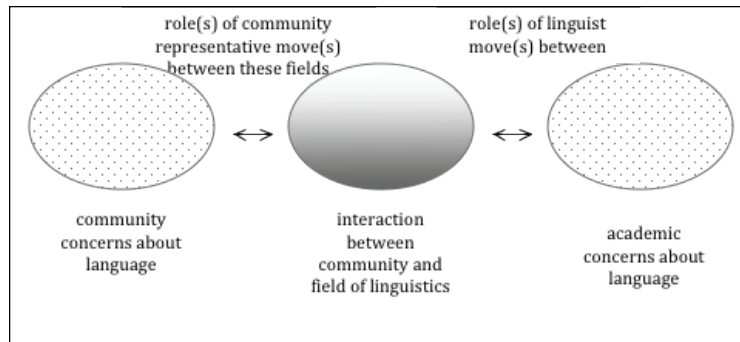


DIAGRAM 4. Three fields of knowledge

In this model, I no longer have to hold conflict between the community and the discipline myself, because the role I play in academia is no longer expected to be the role I play in connection with the community. It is appropriate for me to lay aside much of my disciplinary paraphernalia as I shift into a role focused on community engagement, and it is expected that I will retrieve my disciplinary knowledge as I turn to discussion with academic colleagues. This middle field can be temporary and contingent, or it can be a space that becomes the site of long-term partnerships and organizational structures.

In this model, community business stays in the community (meaning, for example, that the orthography developed for the community, by the community, perhaps with some advice from me, is no longer read as a statement about my linguistics), and similarly, disciplinary concerns are not imposed on the community (so that, for example, my analysis of the intricacies of verb classes is not necessarily ever referred to within the community, unless there is some internally-motivated reason for doing so). Perhaps in using this model there would be less conflict overall, since linguistics could only enter the community domain to the extent that it was considered by the community to be necessary or useful. My role in this model is to carry material from linguistics that may be useful in the community into the shared field for their consideration. I have no control over what is taken from the shared field back into community.

One of the empowering things about this model is that it is a better reflection of reality than Diagram 1 is. As Easton notes (2007:14), it is widely recognized that linguist-designed orthographies are often subsequently neglected in communities. The model proposed here allows for a mediating space between our expertise and what really happens in the community, and it explains the disjunction we observe as being the outcome of a mediating process we have not always been able to see. (See also Leonard & Haynes (2010) on developing shared understandings of speakerhood in a collaborative model.)

To me, the strength of this model is that it provides a series of conceptual gates between disciplinary concerns and the actions of the community: an acknowledgement that the discipline does not view, experience, or value language in the same ways as speakers do. As such, the model reduces my supposed power to act as an expert and professional on a community. This accords with my experience of how things actually work and allows me to put down some of the burden of over-responsibility and guilt I feel in connection to “being the linguist.” Diagram 4 makes it clear that there are spaces in which I can make contributions, and that my contributions can involve the community as well as my discipline, but that my influence in the community is both mediated and limited.

This does not imply that the discipline is therefore removed from the views and concerns of the community, however. As discussed below in Section 6, political realities, the importance of maintaining relationships, and the demands of ethical engagement require us to be accountable to the communities in which we work, or at least to a set of individuals within those communities. In order to work effectively in the academic sphere, we will continue to require the support of the community for our research. In many cases, this includes acknowledging the right of community representatives to review what we publish about them, however inconvenient and time-consuming that might be. At times, this can also constructively include efforts at knowledge transfer, such as plain-language versions of publications or workshops on published materials, so that the contents of (potential) publications can be understood enough for people to give some level of informed consent for publication. Indeed, provided there are the means within the community to allow this (for example, people with the time and energy to engage with this type of work), such exchanges—which themselves would take place in the third space—would hopefully build trust and facilitate more effective relationships and arrangements.

**5. WORKING IN THE THIRD SPACE.** This alternate model of the relationship between communities and linguistics as a discipline allows me to pose some new kinds of questions in relation to my work, my role in each field, and the types of things that linguistics can contribute to the work of a community. It is possible to view a number of recent initiatives as already staking claims within this transitory space. For example, language activists in a range of communities are aware of the ways in which understanding the concepts and methods of linguistics provides them with access to knowledge about their language and culture. These people often have extensive training in linguistics and take this knowledge back to their communities to share more widely. One example of such a process is led by Jessie Little Doe in the Wampanoag community.<sup>7</sup> Indigenous people who are also linguists are powerful figures in this model, as they uniquely have the ability to move right across the available roles and within all three fields of knowledge.

Movement between roles and fields can also be accomplished in close collaborations. In partnership with the Victorian Corporation for Languages, and through close work with Christina Eira, a non-Aboriginal linguist like myself, and Vicki Couzens, a respected Keer-ray Woorroong artist and language activist, I am currently involved in a project that aims to establish rapprochement of Indigenous community understandings of the processes, priori-

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<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/we-still-live-here/film.html> for details.

ties, and products of language revival with the disciplinary knowledge base of Linguistics (Couzens & Eira, forthcoming). This seems to me to represent an exploration of the possibilities of this third space by laying conceptual foundations for something that both parties could share. Within our work we seek a deep understanding of community views on their own terms and then try to make this information available within the discipline, believing that communities know a great deal about their languages that we too could usefully learn.

Thus, the model shows how it is possible for knowledge from community groups to also expand the possibilities within the discipline. We expect that one way it might be useful to create capacity within the discipline for engaging with Indigenous perspectives on language revival is through developing a typology of revival language that allows us to identify complex relationships among the following areas: core analytical units of descriptive linguistics, pathways of reclamation, criteria for authenticity, the contribution of English/Koorie English, attitudes toward language development and language boundaries, identities of participants, lines of transmission, relations between cultural and language reclamation, writing and technology choices, and comparison with linguistic reconstructions of the languages.

Perhaps the area where this model has the most to offer me is in terms of improving my ability to function across the academia/community divide by clarifying the ways in which boundaries are set. This is apparent in the relationship among broadly related questions to do, for example, with the history of the language across each of these fields. In Diagram 5, I have allotted different—but presumably related—questions about the history of a language into the three fields. I do not suggest that these topics are necessarily restricted to these fields; rather I have allocated the topics on the basis of where interest, knowledge, and/or relevant expertise are most likely to be found.

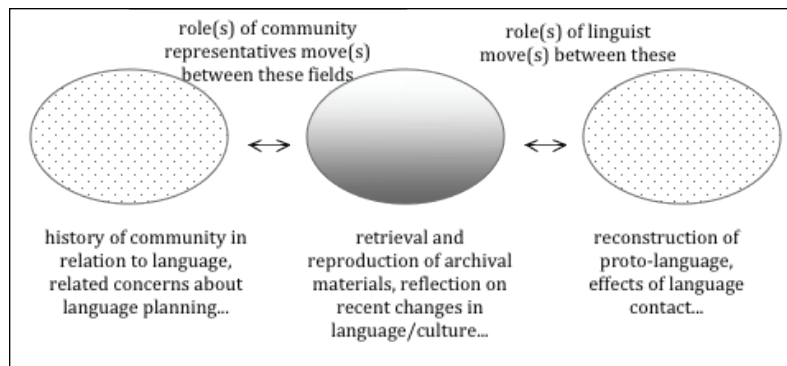


DIAGRAM 5. Relation of three fields to questions about the history of a language

This model could be expanded to explicitly provide space for alternate views from within the community, and for knowledge from a whole range of linguistic subdisciplines, or indeed, from other disciplines as they become relevant to questions that are brought from the community into the shared space.

**6. ETHICAL CONSTRAINTS CROSS THESE FIELDS.** With this model, I am not suggesting that we are free to say one thing to communities and then do quite another thing back in academic settings. In order for me to behave ethically at a very basic level, it is necessary that my actions are consistent and that I am honest with both groups. However, while my actions are consistent across these fields, the meanings attributed to them can be different, since different audiences find different aspects of my work significant.

The diversity we find in the communities where we work makes it impossible to pose “right” and “wrong” stances in relation to the specifics of ethical behavior (see also Macri 2010). With this in mind, the following is a possible list of parameters against which ethical decisions could be made:

- presence of (an) identifiable community/communities (plus discussion of what this means)
- assertion of authority over language by the relevant community/communities
- availability of language as a means of asserting other rights (e.g., land rights)
- degree of self-conscious awareness of language as an index of community identity
- extent of identification between the language and historical pressures on the community/communities as applied by the dominant community, by the language community/communities, and by outsiders, both in the present and historically
- levels of alienation/valorization of language (views within the community of language as liability or asset)
- presence or significance of assimilationist discourses
- presence or significance of pluralist discourses
- conception of language as a property that can be assigned
- degree to which speakerhood is a marker of identity
- attitudes toward authorship in general, as well as in relation to specific types of text
- attitudes toward relationships with outsiders

In addition, there are important issues relating to the economic benefit and social status that my research brings me as a grant recipient and university employee that simply do not flow on to the people with whom I work.

Models of knowledge management are also relevant here. It is not the case that just because we stay out of community business about their language (as per Diagram 4) we can demand that communities stay out of our business involving their language. Our statements about the language are also (able to be read as) statements about the community, and for this reason, when informed consent is required, it is necessary for many reasons to



comply. When communities assert authority over their language, for example by placing restrictions on what we can do with their materials, we must be bound by these if we expect to maintain good relationships with them. Although this does not sit well with a Western model of knowledge management, in which the more everybody (or anybody) knows, the better, it is compatible with a model of knowledge management that views information as having caretakers and knowledge as being a privilege that is earned rather than a right. See Gerdtz (2010) for an exploration of associated issues.

There is a real possibility that the constraints the community imposes will directly impact our ability to publish on certain topics. Explicit negotiation around research plans and allocation of different activities and actions to different spaces could hopefully make any such potential issues evident early in a research relationship. Where such limitations arise, the researcher has a range of choices, from negotiating changes to the focus of their study or publications in relation to the community (if publication in some other area is acceptable) to removal from the relationship altogether. Obviously, the costs associated with the latter option provide strong motivation for negotiating a less radical course of action, especially if the relationship is already long-term. See also Wilkins (1992) for an account of explicitly negotiated agreements in relation to research and publication that facilitated a long-term and constructive set of relationships, and Wilkins' (2000) review of these arrangements. Stebbins & Planigale (2009) provide an example of how the proscription of areas of research can itself become a point of discussion in relation to issues of knowledge management.

In order to negotiate research relationships effectively in the model proposed here, linguists are required to tackle issues around types of knowledge and knowledge management from non-Western perspectives. This represents a departure from normal practice in linguistics, since the descriptivist approach teaches us that linguists are likely to know better than speakers what their language is all about. Rice (2006), in her discussion of ethics in linguistics, refers to the contempt that is expressed (see also Dorian 1998) toward other intellectual traditions when we fail to acknowledge the capacity that others have for knowing about their languages. Rice refers to the writings of Battiste & Henderson, who outline an alternative vision of ethical research practice more broadly:

Ethical research systems and practices should enable Indigenous nations, people, and communities to exercise control over information related to their knowledge and heritage and to themselves. These projects should be managed jointly with Indigenous peoples, and the communities being studied should benefit from training and employment opportunities generated by the research. Above all, it is vital that Indigenous peoples have direct input into developing and defining research practices and projects related to them. To act otherwise is to repeat that familiar pattern of decisions being made for Indigenous people by those who presume to know what is best for them (Battiste & Henderson 2000: 132).

We have a very long way to go in order to bring about this model of research practice as a normal and respected way of going about our business. Both the funding bodies to whom we apply and the internal expectations of our discipline would need to shift quite dramatically (see also Eira 2007, Musgrave & Thieberger 2007). Rice acknowledges both the effort required and the potential payoffs:

A reexamination of what the study of linguistics is all about is not necessarily easy, but under the best of circumstances it will ultimately lead to deeper insights into language, combining different intellectual traditions. It is this opening of the mind that, in the end, makes this type of research truly exciting and empowering for all (Rice: 2006:149–50).

Although I agree with Rice that this type of shift can be very rewarding—indeed, this paper is a part of my ongoing efforts to find ways to make such developments possible for myself—I consider that it is useful to acknowledge the power shifts, and hence the disciplinary shifts, that must be associated with such changes. The model I have outlined above has the immediate purpose of clarifying the situation in which we currently (could) work. The arrows in Diagrams 4 and 5 are bidirectional. This indicates that in addition to the discipline being able to influence the community, it is also possible for communities to influence the discipline. This model could also provide a stepping stone to a different set of practices and more equality in relationships between intellectual traditions. In such a scenario, the middle field may no longer be required, and the blending and merging implied by Diagram 1 could be a true working reality.

In this paper I have emphasised my need for a position in which I can separate my views about language from the decisions made within the language community. This separation allows me to continue to work from a stance that is engaged with the position of the community, even when I do not agree with its choices. I am doing this in reaction to the many times when I have realized that my assumptions about what will be “best” or what is “correct” do not match with the evaluations made by community representatives. In my role as an outside expert from a culturally and economically powerful community, I think it is far too easy for my views to dominate—and when these views are formed too quickly, they amount to a failure of understanding. In the third space, I can call on my expertise when I am asked to do so, but I can also set it aside when appropriate.

The spaces set out in the diagrams represent different conceptions of language. They can also be read as relating to separate and linked relationships among the people involved in language research and language development. Again, negotiation about how spaces are occupied seems to be important, but also, different arrangements will work better in different contexts. As Dobrin (2008) shows, the Western valuing of independence and self-sufficiency potentially works against the interests of the relationship if the community places a premium on interdependence through relationship and exchange:

From a Melanesian cultural perspective what is most empowering about ELDD work [endangered-language documentation and development] is that it brings local people into relationships with outsiders who are associated with the modernity, wealth, and power they seek, yet who care enough to listen to them, even in their ancestral languages that have such little utility in the world they now find encompassing them (Dobrin 2008:318; bracketed text mine).

Thus, at the same time as I may hold back in what I assert in relation to my linguistic knowledge, it can be equally important to allow myself to be drawn into relationships with the communities where I work. Dobrin notes that in the Melanesian context, the linguist is likely to be invited to have a long-term and very concrete role in language-related activities:

Through enduring personal relationships involving earnest solicitude and material generosity, linguists' direct engagement in planning and carrying out linguistic agendas in PNG would elicit not resentment but gratitude, and could make a significant impact on language maintenance by providing the kind of direct, ongoing assistance that village-based projects actually require and that reflects so positively for Melanesians on their communities (Dobrin 2008:319).

It seems to me that the important point here is that I may find myself occupying a space well within the community domain on the level of relationships, but that this is a separate parameter from the knowledge I bring with me. The employment and acceptance of me as an outsider with resources to support language work should not be contingent on people complying with my disciplinary expectations.

**7. FINAL THOUGHTS.** My role as a linguist is contingent, my identity as a person and as a professional is based as much on attributions from others as it is on anything I may assert through my behavior, and the roles from which I operate are at times in direct conflict—conflict which reflects long-term, profound changes in relationships among people, such as processes of (de)colonization.

The simultaneously more fluid and contained model of knowledge about language presented here, by providing me with places to legitimately be my professional self, also gives me more space to experience my private self. When being a linguist becomes too troubling for me in the community, one of the resorts I have made is to lean heavily on my personal, rather than professional, identity. This leads me to a stance of “like me, help me, tell me...because I am a nice person,” rather than “...because that is what I am here for.” The fact of the matter is that I am not that nice all the time, and that is not why people work with me. Any solution that relies on “niceness,” or some other apparently cooperation-enhancing personal quality, has the additional and more general burden of cross-cultural non-translatability. What does it mean to be a nice woman in Papua New Guinea? I am sure I don't know. Even as I shift out of the role of linguist and into the role of incompetent Australian academic, and thence reassume my ongoing battle against the attributed role of a *mis*is, I continue to do identity work—for the sake of my own self-image and for the sake of the relationships I hope to establish and maintain.

Most of the time, the choices I make are “right” from at least one of the perspectives identified above. And, significantly, even my “wrong” choices come from somewhere real and meaningful. Provided I do not expect to impose all my choices on everyone else or believe that all my choices as a linguist must be correct, I am protected from the worst excesses I worry about being guilty of in my work with speakers of endangered languages. The model outlined here makes some of the tensions I operate within more explicit and provides me with a framework for considering how they might be managed. By allowing myself to occupy different roles in relation to different fields of knowledge, I am free to make choices and decisions in relation to my work in the community that may not be ideal from a disciplinary standpoint without thereby being either terribly wrong myself or charged with undermining the core values of my discipline.

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